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California Water Quality Monitoring Council

Jonathan Bishop & Joe Grindstaff, Co-Chairs

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http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/monitoring_council



Mike Chrisman
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Natural Resources

TO: Board, Department, Office and Commission Directors (see Recipient List)

FROM: Jonathan Bishop
Monitoring Council Co-Chair,
Representing Cal/EPA

Joe Grindstaff
Monitoring Council Co-Chair,
Representing the Resources Agency

DATE: April 29, 2009

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF SENATE BILL (SB) 1070:
CALIFORNIA WATER QUALITY MONITORING COUNCIL

We invite your board/department/office/commission to join in the work of the California Water Quality Monitoring Council and its theme-based workgroups. Pursuant to Senate Bill 1070 (Kehoe, 2006) and a Memorandum of Understanding between California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Natural Resources Agency, the Monitoring Council is beginning to bring together water quality and associated ecosystem monitoring and assessment information from local, state and federal agencies, regulated entities, and citizen monitoring groups and to make this information available through a set of theme-based web-portals. Your organization is specifically named as a participant in this process, either in the legislation or in the MOU. A member of the Monitoring Council will be contacting you in the near future to schedule a briefing for you and your staff and to explore how your organization can be involved.

The Monitoring Council's goal is to provide simplified, streamlined access for decision-makers and the public to obtain water quality information that directly addresses users' questions. Issue-specific workgroups, under the overarching guidance of the Monitoring Council, are beginning to evaluate existing monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts and are working to enhance those efforts to improve the delivery of water quality information to the user. The attached paper provides background information on the Monitoring Council and its vision for coordinating water quality monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts.

According to SB 1070, recommendations of the Monitoring Council are to initially focus on the water quality monitoring efforts of state agencies, including yours. By the end of 2009, the Monitoring Council will develop recommendations for a comprehensive monitoring program strategy for California, as required by the legislation. Through these efforts, the Monitoring Council will showcase your board's/department's/office's/commission's water quality and related ecosystem monitoring and assessment efforts, providing you with a wider audience and increased public and legislative support for your programs. Greater collaboration will allow you to leverage the monitoring efforts of other organizations for greater efficiency and effectiveness. It will allow data to be brought together in new ways to enable new questions to be answered, enhancing our State's ability to tackle its critical water quality issues.

California Environmental Protection and Natural Resources Agencies

Your participation is crucial to the success of this endeavor. Here is how you can help:

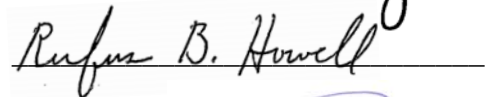
- Provide us with one or more points of contact for the water quality and related ecosystem monitoring and assessment efforts of your board/department/commission.
- Distribute this information to those within your board/department/commission involved in water quality monitoring and assessment activities.
- Attend future Monitoring Council meetings. The Monitoring Council currently meets every other month, alternating between Northern and Southern California. A calendar of meetings and related information are posted on our website.
- Participate in one of the four initial theme-based workgroups to develop a web portal to showcase the monitoring and assessment efforts of your program and allow your efforts to be coordinated and the data combined in new ways.
- Join with others to form one or more new theme-based workgroups.
- Receive updates by email regarding activities of the Monitoring Council by subscribing to the "SB 1070 - Water Quality Monitoring Council" mailing list at http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.shtml.

We urge you to endorse the Monitoring Council's vision and to support and participate in the development and long-term sustainability of the comprehensive monitoring program strategy. On behalf of the members of the Monitoring Council, all of whom have signed this memo to express their commitment and add their voice to this request, we thank you.

Terry Macaulay
Natural Resources Agency Alternate



Rufus Howell
Representing the California Department of Public Health



Armand Ruby
Representing the Regulated Community – Stormwater



Sam Mowbray
Representing the Regulated Community – Publicly
Owned Treatment Works



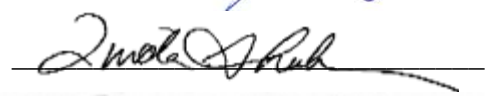
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Representing Agriculture



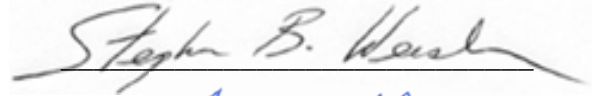
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Attachment

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SENATE BILL 1070 AND THE CALIFORNIA WATER QUALITY MONITORING COUNCIL

The Water Quality Information Problem

Many agencies, regulated dischargers, and hundreds of water bond grant recipients are spending millions of dollars each year to collect water quality data. The data need to be turned into useable information to help decision makers and stakeholders understand the status of our waters and aquatic ecosystems, public health and welfare issues related to water quality, and the effectiveness of agency programs to manage our water resources. But California's water quality information system is defective. There are inconsistent monitoring objectives and methods to collect and assess the data. Often it is not possible to integrate data from different studies. And there is no single, user-friendly place to access the data. ***This provides a tremendous opportunity for improvement.***

The California Water Quality Monitoring Council

In response, Senate Bill 1070 was signed into law in 2006. This law required California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) and the Natural Resources Agency to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the California Water Quality Monitoring Council. The MOU was signed in November 2007. Members of the Monitoring Council represent Cal/EPA, the Resources Agency, the Department of Public Health, the regulated stormwater and publicly owned treatment works community, the agricultural community, citizen monitoring groups, the public, the scientific community, and water purveyors. The State Water Resources Control Board has the responsibility to administer the Monitoring Council. The text of SB 1070 and the MOU are posted on our website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/monitoring_council

SB 1070 provides that the Monitoring Council “shall review existing water quality monitoring, assessment, and reporting efforts, and shall recommend specific actions and funding needs necessary to coordinate and enhance those efforts.” It directs the Monitoring Council's initial focus on the water quality and associated ecosystem monitoring efforts of State agencies, including yours, and to build upon existing programs rather than creating new ones.

Initial Recommendations

In December 2008, the Monitoring Council reported to Cal/EPA and the Resources Agency its initial “recommendations for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of existing water quality data collection and dissemination, and for ensuring that collected data are maintained and available for use by decisionmakers and the public.” [California Water Code §13181(b)] That report and a presentation of the recommendations are posted on our website.

While past improvement efforts have focused mainly on methods consistency, standardizing data formats, developing large databases, and other technical issues, the Monitoring Council believes that the best way to coordinate and enhance California's monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts is first to provide a platform for simplified, streamlined access to water quality information that directly addresses users' questions. The Monitoring Council recommends that issue-specific workgroups, under the overarching guidance of the Monitoring Council, evaluate existing monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts and work to enhance those efforts to improve the delivery of water quality information to the user. This will provide the structure and incentive to coordinate disparate monitoring programs, improve the technical infrastructure needed to support that coordination, and will act to reduce conflicts and incompatibilities within the technical infrastructure as it continues to develop.

Theme-Based Web Portals Provide Access

To illustrate this concept, the Monitoring Council is developing a website that will provide a single, global access point to a complete set of theme-based web portals for water quality monitoring data and assessment information. The website is designed around intuitively clear questions that are readily understood by managers, the public, and scientists:

- Is our water safe to drink?
- Is it safe to swim in our waters?
- Is it safe to eat fish and shellfish from our waters?
- Are our aquatic ecosystems healthy?
- What stressors and processes affect our water quality?

A centralized website will provide access to and awareness of the variety of monitoring efforts being conducted and will legitimize the efforts of each theme-based workgroup.

Theme-Specific Workgroups

To achieve its solution, the Monitoring Council envisions a number of theme-specific workgroups, staffed by issue experts representing key stakeholders that will develop a web portal devoted to their theme or sub-theme. Each workgroup will develop underlying monitoring and assessment methods and data management procedures according to performance measures defined by Monitoring Council. The workgroups will coordinate existing monitoring programs, achieve standardization necessary to meet users' needs, and will report periodically to Monitoring Council.

Four sub-themes have been chosen for immediate action, based on opportunities to build on existing efforts that have already made substantial progress. They include groups with which the Monitoring Council has already had interaction and have expressed interest in participating. The Wetlands Monitoring Workgroup has stepped forward to become a subcommittee of Monitoring Council, and has asked for its assistance and direction. Their Wetland Tracker website (<http://www.wetlandtracker.org/>) will become the portal for their sub-theme within the aquatic ecosystem health theme. The Beach Water Quality Workgroup currently coordinates monitoring efforts of the Water Boards, Department of Public Health, county health agencies, and coastal dischargers. Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card website (<http://www.healthebay.org/brcv2/default.aspx>) is featured in the Monitoring Council's initial web portal development efforts for the coastal beaches sub-theme within the safe-to-swim theme. Under the safe-to-eat fish and shellfish theme, the Bioaccumulation Oversight Group is a collaborative effort of the Water Boards' Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and others to support the development of fish consumption advisories for mercury, legacy pesticides, and other bioaccumulated pollutants. Under the safe-to-drink theme, the development of the GeoTracker GAMA website is bringing together a variety of groundwater monitoring efforts, including the Department of Public Health's drinking water program, US Geologic Survey, Department of Pesticide Regulation, and underground tank and other contaminated site monitoring performed under Regional Water Board and other agency oversight.

By the end of 2009, the Monitoring Council's will be developing recommendations for a comprehensive monitoring program strategy for California, as required by SB 1070. [California Water Code §13181(e)]